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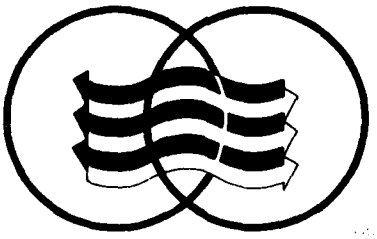

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COMMUNICATION INFORMATION FLOWS

AND

LEADER ROLES IN ORGANIZATIONS

Rudi Klauss

Barry Bozeman

Final ~~Report~~

- Sep 1981

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

This is a final report of a research program carried out between May 1976 and September 1981. The research dealt with interpersonal communication processes and their outcomes in organizational contexts. In addition, the information environment within which individuals operate was also considered.

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The work conducted under contract N0001476-C-0912 was carried out between May 1976 and September 1981. During the initial three-year period of the project, the research focused on the investigation of interpersonal communication processes and their outcomes in organizational contexts. This line of inquiry was broadened in the last two years of the contract to include the consideration of information channel preferences and channel source variables in the communication process.

In the first phases of the project a questionnaire instrument (The Communication Styles Survey) was refined and administered in a variety of organizational settings, including a Federal civilian agency, military bases, manufacturing firms, as well as in several local government social service agency settings. A data base was developed which included some 500 focal person managers and approximately 3500 colleagues (subordinates, peers, and superiors) of these focal persons. The strategy for collecting data from managers and their colleagues combined a research emphasis with a feedback approach, which enabled participating focal person managers to receive feedback concerning how their colleagues viewed them on specific dimensions of communication behavior. Thus, an attempt was made to link prior research findings to our research and at the same time provide an opportunity for learning to individuals who provided the data for the research.

A communication model was tested which hypothesized that an individual focal person's interpersonal communication style shapes colleagues' perceptions of the focal person's credibility and in turn is related to satisfaction with the job, and also to role clarity (for subordinate colleagues, in particular). Five specific dimensions of verbal communication style were identified through factor analysis of a multiple item questionnaire: careful transmitter, open and two-way communication, frankness, informality, and careful listening. In

addition relationships of communication style to organization size, technology, managerial success, and other variables in the communication setting were examined.

Overall, some of the major findings indicated that:

1) the five dimensions of interpersonal communication style were stable across a variety of organizational settings, including military officers, private sector managers, Federal civilian personnel, as well as county level social service managers;

2) the five dimensions were significantly related to focal persons being seen as credible (informative, trustworthy, and dynamic) and to subordinate role clarity, satisfaction with focal person, and to a lesser extent with job satisfaction;

3) interpersonal communication style appeared to be largely independent of communication content (direct job related; organizational; social/personal) or context (e.g. distance, differences in age between sender and receiver, etc.);

4) communication style was related to organizational technology; that is, in high technology work contexts effective communication appeared to be more difficult to achieve, as compared to stable, traditional technology settings). Size(department size, work unit size and organization size), on the other hand generally was not related to communication style.

5) communication style was moderately related to managerial leadership style, while the relationship between ratings of communication style and focal person managerial success (in a salary progression sense) varied across organizations.

6) generally, focal persons self reports of communication style differed considerably from colleagues' ratings of focal persons' communication style.

More specific discussion of findings in relation to size, technology, managerial leadership style, success, and other variables in the communication setting are reported in detail in technical reports 1-6 which have prepared during the contract period.

A second major focus of work centered on problems in acquisition and use of information in technology-intensive organizations. In Techncial Report Seven the researchers tested hypotheses pertaining to the case of scientific and technical information. The study was based on responses to a questionnaire mailed to program managers of the Canadian Environmental Protection Service. It was hypothesized that four clusters of variables would have predictive value in respect to channel preference and "gatekeeping": Job Perceptions, Administrative Role, Professionalism, and Perceived Utility. The gatekeeping and channel preference variables were regressed on variables within each of the above clusters, then a "best predictor" equation was developed for each of the dependent variables. The chief findings can be summarized as follows: (1) Preference for formal channels is associated with a low opinion of co-workers, increased age (independent of admininstrative responsibilty) and high perceived utility for STI: (2) Preference for informal channels inside the organization is associated with perceived utility for STI: (3) Preference for informal channels outside the organization is associated with membership in professional organizations; (4) Gatekeeping is associated with a low opinion of co-workers, doctoral-level degree, high attendance at professional meetings, and specialization.

After presenting the research findings, strategies were discussed for exploiting the findings to enhance use of scientific and technical information in public organizations.

The sample and the information focus are expanded in technical report number eight. The study tests a number of hypotheses pertaining to

boundary-spanning in public organization. The focus is on boundary-spanning behavior within state government with data drawn from questionnaire responses of a sample of individuals employed in technologically-intensive programs of New York State government (n=650). Hypothesized predictions of boundary-spanning activity include: (1) Interorganizational conflict; (2) Perception of the importance of external political change; (3) Program stability, (4) "Organicness", organizations strucuture, and (5) Job satisfaction.

A factor analysis yielded clustering patterns closely conforming to the predictor variables and scores on a boundary-spanning scale were correlated with factor scores for one dimension. Four of the independent variables factors are significantly associated with boundary-spanning activity. The dominant factor among the six dimensions was Consultative, but its importance relative to boundary-spanning is the least of the four significantly related factors. The best predictors were External Politics and Program Growth; Interorganizational Conflict was also significantly associated with boundary-spanning.

Taken together, the findings provide a profile of public sector boundary-spanning. The boundary spanner's organization is enjoying growth but at the expense of some external conflict. In such circumstances it is especially important that political change be closely monitored since any future growth can be expected to be closely tied to developments in the external political environment.

Index to Technical Reports and Publications

Technical Report

Development of the Bass-Klauss Impact Model of Interpersonal Communication. Technical Report #1. Office of Naval Research Contract No. N0001476-C-0912, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, Jan. 1977.

Measuring the Impact on Subordinates of Managers' Interpersonal Communication Styles and Credibility. Technical Report #2. Office of Naval Research Contract No. N0001476-C-0912, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, April 1977.

Impact Model of Managers' Interpersonal Communication Styles in an Industrial and Navy Civilian Organization. Technical Report #3. Office of Naval Research Contract No. N0001476-C-0912, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, July 1977.

Factors Influencing Communication Style, its Credibility and Impact. Technical Report #4. Office of Naval Research Contract No. N0001476-C-0912, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, November 1977.

The Impact of Organization Size and Technology on Managerial Communication Style, its Credibility and Consequences. Technical Report #5. Office of Naval Research Contract No. N0001476-C-0912, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, September, 1979.

Public Managers and Scientific and Technical Information. Technical Report #7. Office of Naval Research Contract No. N0001476-C-0912, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, September, 1980. (To appear in Administration and Society, 1981).

Boundary-Spanning and Perceived Political Environments in Technologically-Intensive Public Agencies. Technical Report Eight. Office of Naval Research Contract No. N0001476-C-0912, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, September, 1980. (To appear in D. Sahal (ed.) Technical Invention (Lexington, MA.: Lexington Books, 1981).

The Impact of Communication Styles (New York: Academic Press, forthcoming)

Consultancy support to research project

Bernard M. Bass Dr. Bass participated in major phases throughout the research program. This included the theory and model development stages during the initial period of the program, as well as assistance in questionnaire design, measurement construction, sampling and data collection. In addition, he particpated in data analysis, and in the preparation of technical reports. He was also the junior author of the book The Impact of Communication Styles (New York: Academic Press, forthcoming) which summarized major portions of the research program.

Harry Ries Dr. Ries was a consultant to the project in the initial period of the research program and provided assistance concerning sampling strategies and statistical analysis procedures.